

Mental wellness support is strengthened across region

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A NEW crop of mental health first aid personnel will see vital awareness further disseminated throughout the region.



Hearten Up was a runner up in last year's rural city Australia Day awards for Event of the Year, and recent mental health awareness training provided late last year continued to build on the strong foundation established in 2020.

Program founder and former Wangaratta resident Joel Clapham said it was important to establish a diverse variety of individuals comfortable with tackling mental wellness in the community.

"Being able to have skilled and confident people in the community to support others is so important," he said.

"Some of the programs in the community over the last few years have been fantastic, things like R U OK? Day has pushed the conversation.

"Our program is about going beyond asking 'are you okay?' because the answer is not always going to be yes.

"It's about establishing frameworks."

The most recent bout of training took place at Wangaratta Library in conjunction with the Grit and Resilience Program in late November, with 22 new mental health first aid personnel emerging from the session to impart their knowledge throughout the community.

Mr Clapham said providing a second training session to follow on from 2020's inaugural success in the rural city had been special.

"To be able to train a bunch of people in Wangaratta where I grew up, it was so incredible for my

sense of connection during what had been a difficult year," he said.

"We were able to train at Wangaratta Library; we had two groups of people become mental health first aiders.

“All sorts of people from different backgrounds came along; we had parents and children, partners, sportspeople – some were teachers, others were retirees, and they’ll be able to take those skills and support the people around them.

“They’re all people who genuinely care about the community.”